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Wechuge and Windigo: A Comparison of Cannibal Belief Among Boreal Forest Athapaskans and Algonkians

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RÉSUMÉ

Le mythe de Windigo, un monstre cannibal, est répandu chez les Algonquins des forêts boréales. Les Anthropologues ont appelé "psychose Windigo" le comportement associé à ce mythe. Cet article décrit un phénomène analogue au Windigo, Wechuge, chez les Beavers athapaska. Les significations contextuelles de ces deux phénomènes sont comparées. Pris dans son contexte, Wechuge apparaît comme une démonstration de pouvoir surnaturel. L'analyse remet en question le bien-fondé de la perception du Windigo comme psychotique: il s'agirait là d'une évaluation basée sur le contexte de l'anthropologue plutôt que sur celui des acteurs.

Belief in a cannibal monster known as Windigo has been reported by most students of boreal forest Algonkian culture. A number of authors (Cooper 1933; Hallowell 1955; Landes 1938; Parker 1960; Teicher 1960; Hay 1971) have linked belief in the Windigo monster to a behavioural complex involving threatened or actual cannibalism considered to be a culturally patterned form of psychosis. The literature on the Windigo phenomenon generally assumes that it represents psychological weakness and breakdown of the normally functioning personality. This diagnosis of Windigo behaviour as psychotic has not been seriously questioned in the literature even though all authors recognize that in none of the reported cases has there been first hand information on individual

case histories let alone analysis of subjects' lives by observers with experience in psychiatric diagnosis.

In reading through the literature on Windigo one is struck by a repetition of the following two statements: 1. The diagnostic feature of Windigo behaviour that automatically makes it psychotic is the intense unsocialized desire to eat human flesh and 2. Native explanation of the behaviour is that the person has been the victim of sorcery or possession by the Windigo spirit. Teicher (1960:5) says, "The outstanding symptom of the aberration known as windigo psychosis is the intense compulsive desire to eat human flesh. In many instances, this desire is satisfied through actual cannibal acts, usually directed against members of the individual's immediate family. In other instances, before authentic cannibalism takes place, the individual is either cured or killed... The individual who becomes a windigo is usually convinced that he has been possessed by the spirit of the windigo monster. He therefore believes that he has lost permanent control over his own actions and that the only possible solution is death." Hay (1971:1) says, "The windigo psychosis has long been regarded as a disorder specific to the people of the northern tribes of Algonkian-speaking Indians. The disorder is marked by the desire to eat human flesh — a desire to do something which is ordinarily extremely repugnant and horrifying to these people. ...To the Indians, the desire to eat human flesh was incomprehensible except as the result of sorcery or possession by the mythical windigo spirit." Parker (1960:603) describes it as "a bizarre form of mental disorder involving obsessive cannibalism" and regards the victim's belief in his possession by the Windigo spirit as an obsession "with paranoid ideas of being bewitched."

In the course of field work among the Athapaskan Beaver Indians (Dunne-za) of the Peace River area I have become acquainted with a form of cannibal belief and behaviour associated with this belief that are clearly related to the Algonkian Windigo and yet are central to a sense of cultural and individual strength rather than weakness. The cannibal figure, Wechuge, is as feared as the Algonkian windigo but because he has become "too powerful", not because he is in some sense psychotic. Comparison of the two phenomena leads to one to ask, 1. Are Athapaskan

and Algonkian cultures so different that the same cannibal monster belief can have almost opposite meanings in the two different contexts; 2. If the complex does indeed mean something different to the two groups why is this so? 3. It is possible that the idea of windigo as psychosis is more a function of our own categories of thought than that of the Indians themselves? This paper will describe the Dunne-za concept of Wechuge in terms of its meaning within the context of their ideas about supernatural power and then compare Wechuge to Windigo as it has been described, concluding with an examination of the three questions posed above.

WECHUGE AMONG THE DUNNE-ZA

Before I begin to describe Wechuge I must emphasize that the Dunne-za take it very seriously and believe that to discuss it frivolously is both foolish and dangerous to oneself and others. I trust that the reader will receive this information in the spirit of serious inquiry into the human condition in which it was received from the Dunne-za.

The idea of giant man-eating monsters is deeply engrained in Dunne-za mythology as it is in that of the Algonkians. Dunne-za myth cycles tell of a time when giant animals hunted and ate people. These animals behaved like people and the people were compelled to be their game. They are referred to as Wolverine Person, Spider Person, Beaver Person, Frog Person etc. Although they were all overcome and transformed into their present form by the culture hero their power is still in existence. Indeed, it is these giant People-eaters who confer supernatural power to the child on his or her vision quest. Contact with this power gives a person the ability to find and transform animals into food. In the context of an underlying belief that animals are sentient volitional creatures like ourselves the idea of Person-like animals who eat animal-like people is a logical transformation of the economic fact that people must eat animals in order to live. Both Algonkians and Athapaskans share a common mythical background of belief in giant Person-eating animals, a transformative culture hero and some form of association between supernatural power and the eating of creatures who are sentient and volitional.

The behavioural characteristics attributed by the Dunne-za to Wechuge are remarkably like those attributed to the various Person-eating giant animals of mythic times. The giant animals do not pursue their victims with inchoate frenzy but rather use artifice and a knowledge of their game's desires and weaknesses to bring them down. They hunt people with the cultural strategy and intelligence that people use to hunt animals. Similarly, Wechuge lives apart from the people and uses their desire for food to lure them to him. He is like one of the giant Person-eating animals of mythic times come back in human form. The following stories illustrate this quality of the Wechuge monster:

WECHUGE STORY TOLD BY JUMBIE

One time a long time ago a whole bunch of people were camped together. It was wintertime and lots of families camped one place. They didn't move around. There must have been about 100 people camped there. One night one young man heard somebody calling him outside his tipi. The person outside called in to him, "Somebody wants you to visit him." It was the middle of the night but the young man thought, "Maybe somebody got a moose. Maybe they want to feed me. That must be why they are calling me in the middle of the night." He got up and went outside.

Wechuge, the man who had called him, was standing there. Wechuge came forward and choked the young man so fast that he didn't have a chance to scream. Then Wechuge carried him back where he was coming from. Nobody knew a thing about what had happened. Wechuge was a badman. He didn't live with those people. He stayed by himself and then followed people's tracks.

The young man that Wechuge carried off was married. His wife had heard somebody calling her husband but she hadn't really woken up and she didn't go with him. Lots of time went by and her husband didn't come back. She began to worry. She went outside. It was still night time and there wasn't a fire in the camp. Everyone was asleep. The woman went to some people and woke them up. She told them, "Somebody called my husband and

then he went out. That was a long time ago. I don't know where he is."

They got up and started looking around. They woke up everyone in the camp, all the people, but they didn't find that man. Then they lit torches, big sticks and started looking for tracks. Soon they found the tracks of the big bad man, that Wechuge. They knew darn well that he had taken that man. "If he's taken one, he will take every one of us," they said. All the men and young men gathered together. They had to decide what to do. They are going to follow Wechuge.

One young man who was crazy thought that he was a little bit tough.

"I'll be the first one to go after that man," he said. One middle-aged man thought he wouldn't make it. He thought that the boy wasn't as tough as Wechuge. He said, "I'll try him first", but the boy said, "No, I want to." So the middle aged man said "all right". He knew he would come second anyway.

All the men and boys went out after Wechuge. They followed his tracks. Not too far away they saw him. He was sitting by the fire, spitting the young man he had killed. He had opened him from neck to ass and taken out his guts, and he was roasting the whole man.

The men and boy circled around behind Wechuge in the bush. When they got close the young boy jumped on Wechuge's back. He took his shoulders in his hands and tried to pull him back. Wechuge sat there just like a rock. He didn't budge. Then he reached around behind his back with one hand and grabbed the young man's hand. Then threw him in the fire.

Just then the middle-aged man jumped on Wechuge. They wrestled for an hour. Then the middle-age man grabbed the cannibal by the neck and by the leg and broke his back. He threw him in the fire. But that Wechuge was tough. He didn't die from that. All his stomach and back had turned to ice. That's why they couldn't kill him easily. They could see the ice melting out of him as he lay on the fire. For the rest of the night and all the next day they kept the fire going. At last he died. Until all the ice had gone he still wanted to get up and kill people.

WECHUGE STORY TOLD BY AKU

I don't know this story well. There's someone I don't know. The people knew that one lake always had lots of fish. Whenever they were hungry or starving in the wintertime they would go to that lake. There was one man who was eating people. He was *Wechuge*. He knew that all the people would be coming to that lake so he went there and made himself a great wooden tipi and put holes through the logs so he could see when people were coming. He was a very tough man, big and tough. He didn't kill those people with a gun or bow. He would dream about dirty stuff. Then he would take green logs and carve plates and spoons and cups from them. Then he would carve something on them, monsters and things like that with a stone knife. When people came he would ask them if they would like to eat. The people were hungry so they would say yes. He caught lots of fish for them and he fed them from those plates. The people ate what he gave them. In not more than a minute they would be dead. That man was a good medicine man, really strong (mayine natsut). He went on like that, killing those people and eating them for a long time. He ate lots of people.

One summer one boy and his grandmother were really hungry. They had heard about the man who was eating people, but the only way that they could eat was to go to that lake. They decided to stay at a different place on the lake from the cannibal. The boy wanted to visit him all the same. "I think I'll go see that man," he told his grandmother. She told him, "Don't go," but he said, "I'm just going to visit him." Twice more she told him not to go. That boy knew something. Since he was a baby, the buffalo raised him. Finally his grandmother agreed and the boy went to the cannibal's camp.

The boy sat down and the cannibal offered him fish on a plate he had carved. The boy took the plate and finished it off. He didn't die. That boy was not really man. He was from the buffalos. He was half-animal, half-man, a different person. (gradi-dunne; achu-dunne). The cannibal told his wife, "You'd better give him another plate." So they gave him another plate filled with fish. The boy finished all the fish on his plate but still he

didn't die. "How come you don't die?" the cannibal said. "All the other people have died." The boy said, "Why, I'm not filled up yet." That old lady had found the boy in the buffalo hair. He was like Aghintosdunne. "Grandfather," he said, "I thought you were just feeding me, I didn't know you were trying to kill me."

The cannibal got his arrows. He couldn't kill him with the plates so he was going to kill him with arrows. The boy was still licking his plate. He told the boy, "You'd better throw up the food I fed you. I want to eat it." The boy made ready to throw up in the cannibal's hands. The only thing that came out in his hands was a little green frog. The cannibal swallowed that frog and sat down. The little boy sat down too. He looked at the man. He was sitting still, just looking at one spot on his foot. He didn't feel very well. The boy knew that was going to happen so he went back.

Not long after that, the cannibal's wife came after him. "Your grandfather tells you to come and fix him up. Something's the matter with him, I don't know what."

"I don't know either," the boy said, but the woman said, "Just come and take a look," so they went back. When they got to the cannibal he was lying still. He didn't know anything. The boy took some black sticks from the fire and put them on his neck. The black went right through him and he died. "I can't fix this man up. He's already dead," the boy said. That's how he killed fish man.

In the first story Wechuge is described as a bad man who "stayed by himself and followed people's tracks". In the second story Wechuge placed his camp along a well known people's trail. In other stories he makes a trail leading to his fortified camp by bending grass stems, the sign used by the Dunne-za to tell others who are hungry they have found food. Wechuge as portrayed in these stories is not a psychotic obsessed with the desire to eat human flesh but is rather a human who behaves like one of the man-eating animals of mythic times, hunting people by taking advantage of their desires and weaknesses. It is in this context of Wechuge as a person who behaves like one of the giant animals before the culture hero's transformation that the

common description of Wechuge as someone who has become “too strong” becomes intelligible. For a real person to become like Wechuge in the stories would be for that person to behave like the giant animal that is the basis of his supernatural power. Indeed, the cannibal in the story of Aku is called “Fish Man,” implying that he is the giant animal in human form.

The Wechuge concept of the Dunne-za is more than a set of stories about people who act like the giant animals before the culture hero’s transformations. There are times and circumstances when people actually begin to become Wechuge. I know of only one instance of more or less authenticated cannibalism and that was said to have occurred sometime in the late 19th century to a man named Tsegute. However, real people that I knew personally were said to have begun the transformation to Wechuge and been cured.

BECOMING WECHUGE

To become Wechuge is to become “too strong”. Wechuge is not an unspecified Person-eater but is always the particular Person-eating monster that is a person’s animal friend and the source of his supernatural power. The integration of Wechuge with ideas about supernatural power is very clear in Dunne-za thought and practice. Although Algonkian cultures also have a vision quest based concept of supernatural power the ethnographies do not give a clear picture about the degree of connection between belief in supernatural power and the windigo phenomenon.

The possibility of becoming Wechuge underlies every situation in which a Dunne-za person with supernatural power finds himself. Older people are generally acknowledged to have more power than younger people or at least give out more obvious signs of their medicine powers to those around them. The space around a powerful person is to be respected. One must learn the proper respect for the space around such a person so as not to violate one of the personal taboos that go with his power. These taboos are actions relating to the action of the giant animals who hunted people in mythic times. I learned about some of these taboos by

inadvertently violating them or seeing them infringed upon by other white people. I never saw one consciously violated by another adult Dunne-za but I was told of occasions when such a violation occurred. It was this type of conscious violation of a person's medicine taboos that was said to bring on the appearance of Wechuge.

Once in the camp of an old man named Jumbie a white woman who has lived in the Peace River area for many years and claims to know the Indian People well attempted to take a picture of the old man with a flash camera. She did not ask permission to take the picture and when the camera was raised some of the younger people in the camp told her not to take the picture. "Old man he don't like that kind." Although Dunne-za do not like to have their pictures taken without having been given the opportunity to give their consent, the issue in this case was more serious. It was the flash that the old man "did not like." The white woman persisted in attempting to take the picture, and Jumbie, seeing that she would not respect his personal space, dove beneath a sleeping robe in the back of the tent. To the white woman this was an act of fear and reinforced her belief that Indians are child-like and superstitious. To every Dunne-za present, however, Jumbie's action demonstrated his power, not weakness and bravery rather than fear. To have been exposed to the flash would have made him "too strong". It would have risked bringing down to earth the power of Giant Eagle whose flashing eyes still penetrate from heaven to earth in time of storm. The power would have compelled the man to become the Person-eating monster and the man would have lost his own will and judgement to that of the all consuming monster inherent within himself by virtue of his encounter with it during the experience of visionary transformation as a child.

On another occasion I was driving with the Dunne-za Prophet or Dreamer, Charlie Yahey and turned on the car radio to country and western music. A young man in the car with us reached over and turned off the radio, an action I found most unusual since most Dunne-za enjoy this kind of music and normally would not interfere with another person's choice. In reply to my question I was again told simply that "Old man he don't like that". I did

not understand the meaning of what had happened for more than a year. I was only able to learn that Charlie Yahey could not hear any sound make by a stretched string or hide and hence he could not hear guitar music. Indeed, once in town he had been in a cafe when the juke box began playing guitar music and he had begun to get "too strong". He was hustled out of town and into the bush where another person sang his medicine song to overcome the emerging monster within the old man. Just what this monster was became clear to me when I connected the events I have related with a story about Giant Spider Man who lured people to a mountain top by swinging a sort of bull-roarer around his head. The sound make by this stretched spider thread attracted the natural curiosity of passing humans and when they approached they were killed by the spider man who sucked their body fluids. To make a similar sound in a similar way would bring the mythic monster back from then and there to here and now. The Spider Man within the human would become too strong, and all the people would be in danger.

For every power there is a myth, and within each of these stories is the information relevant to the personal taboos demanded of a person who has encountered that power in a vision quest. To act in a way that evokes the behaviour of the mythic monster associated with a person's medicine is to activate the myth and bring it into reality. The space around a person with recognized supernatural power can not be taken for granted. One is expected to know and respect the mythic role into which he would be forced to step at the appropriate signal. Although at times I inadvertently violated personal taboos and thus became aware of them, these violations were not interpreted as intentional affronts and hence did not trigger the otherwise automatic response. My behaviour was viewed as that of a child. Certain missteps were accepted as part of the learning process.

Adult Dunne-za are reasonably expected to know the taboos and hence the supernatural powers of the people with whom they come into contact. When in doubt they are expected to ask if it is alright to act in a certain way or offer a certain food to a person whose powers are unknown to them. One person told me about the taboos associated with medicine power as follows:

If I know something (i.e., have supernatural power), and you feed me meat and I know there's fly eggs in it I have to eat it. When Asa (grandfather) was alive Mom was always careful when she fed him. When we fed him we always told him, "Look through the meat". If there's fly eggs he doesn't want to eat it. If we don't tell him then he has to eat it. But lots of people make a mistake. That's why lots of people have gotten strong. They make a mistake. I wouldn't be like that, me. I wouldn't be like that now. I know it helps lots to know something but you have to watch all the time. People are scared of you. Even when I go down to Rose Prairie they're afraid to feed me. They have to ask me first if I like to eat that. Even Beaver meat, they ask me if I eat that kind of meat. I say, "Sure, I eat it." Lots of Indians are afraid of any kind of man. You never know if, me, if I know something. You wouldn't know. Just like that, you don't know with another kind of person.

Anyone other than a child or whiteman is expected to know and observe the medicine taboos of their fellow Dunne-za. To violate these taboos is to bring Wechuge among the people. The account quoted above came up because I had been told previously that the person's grandfather (Asa) had not too long before begun to get "too strong" after being given meat with fly eggs in it by some thoughtless people from another community. Briefly, the story as I was told it goes as follows:

Asa, a man in his early seventies, had been married to a woman in her early thirties about ten years previously and had had several children by her. Recently she had left him and taken up residence with a younger man in the same community. The old man now had his own house and was fed by whichever other family had fresh meat. His youngest daughter, a girl of about 5, lived with him and slept in the same bed. He was in a sense everybody's grandfather and was called Asa by most of the younger people. Whenever meat was being distributed the hunter's wife always made sure to send a portion over with some child to Asa.

As I was told the story, some people from another community were visiting the reserve where Asa lived. Perhaps they were from the group to which his ex-wife belonged, although I was never told outright who these people were. A woman or women among the visitors sent Asa some meat that had been hanging for a time. There were fly eggs on this meat. Because the meat was a gift and because he had not been asked by the visitors if he could

eat it, he had no choice but to accept the gift. He ate the meat and began to get "too strong". He was a tiny man, but his behaviour was frightening to the point of throwing the whole community into panic. The little old man had climbed up onto his bed and begun jumping up and down like a frog singing his medicine song. It was well known in the community that one of his medicine animals was frog. One sign by which they knew this was that he did not play drums and did not even like to hear the sound of drums. When the people were singing and dancing or playing the stick game, he would retire from the scene. His grandson told me:

You know that a long time ago Asa didn't like even to hear the sound of drums. You know those frogs? Even now you can hear them gamble; one bunch of frogs up the river and one down the creek, you can hear them making lots of noise back and forth, and when some night the bottom stream they don't make any more noise, that's when they lose. That top one making lots of noise, they're the winners. It just goes back and forth. Old man told me about that. That's why he doesn't like to hear drums long time ago. Asa said "I've been staying with those people on the bottom of the lake." You can't beat me gambling." He heard that drum on the bottom of the lake long time ago. That's why he doesn't like to hear that drum. When he was younger he was like that. But when he got older he got used to it. He didn't like to hear the drum because he heard it down there. He couldn't play the drum and he couldn't see people throw it. He stayed with them and they gave him his power. Those frogs gave him his power, their power, and they heard that drum up there in the same time. They play. Up here on land that's different. That's why he doesn't like it.

To the people in camp, the little old man bouncing up and down on his bed was becoming the Person-eating monster Wechuge. To an outside observer his behaviour would have appeared ridiculous and deranged, an object of pity rather than fear, but to his fellow Dunne-za he was becoming the Giant Frog, a warrior and gambler of superhuman power. The people could no longer relate to him as a person. Some gave way to their fear and prepared to flee from him. Unless the power growing stronger within him was returned to its proper place he would begin to eat his own lips. In this first act of the self-consuming monster the people would see themselves consumed, for he had been one of them. Once the flesh of his lips had lodged within his body he

would be the all powerful invincible Wechuge monster of mythic time and space. When children talk too loudly and out of place they are told “Naa-za wōtlō”, literally “your lips too much”. The import of this everyday admonition is loosely equivalent to “shut up” but its more subtle implication is, “with your excess of lips you are consuming our common space.” When he had consumed his own lips he would no longer be able to speak to them and could be reunited with them only by eating them. Once he had eaten his lips his internal organs would turn to ice, and he would be beyond them in power and cunning. Unless the Giant Frog could be sent back to its home beneath the lake the people would be in mortal danger.

The old man’s frog-like performance began when only women and children were in camp. To attempt to cure him they turned to the person closest to his power, the 5 year old daughter who slept as he did under the medicine bundle containing, among other things, tiny images of frogs that were alive and moved when the bundle was opened. The young girl took down his medicine bundle and brought it close to him. She who had been closest to him physically and had slept under the influence of his medicine was able to approach him and gently pass the bundle over his body. As the story was told, this action had the desired effect and he began to grow calm. The cure that she began through the application of his own medicine was completed when other people arrived on the scene and used their own powers to bring him back. I was not told directly the logic of the cure, but it seems to have been that she was able to entice the power of the giant frog to leave his body and return to its place within the medicine bundle. Neither was I told exactly why giving the old man meat with fly eggs in it would cause him to go Wechuge. I do not know for sure if a taboo against such meat was something peculiar to his medicine power, but there is an obvious connection of eater-eaten between frogs and flies, so that it would make sense that to eat the eggs of flies, the food of frogs, would intensify his medicine power and effect his transformation into the giant frog whose flies were people.

I was told another story of the Wechuge performance that comes when a person’s medicine is violated. In this case my

informant was a five year old girl who had been directly involved in the affair. All the other people were well known to me. One long-time member of the band in question was a lame widower in his early sixties. Because he had not taken up permanent residence with a woman his house had developed into a place where teen-age boys and young unmarried men stayed. One of his medicine powers was wolf, although it was unknown to me until I learned of it through the young girl's description of the wechuge incident. One of the young men who stayed with him from time to time, a grandson of the old man with frog power, had gotten into a pattern of violent, destructive and "crazy" behaviour. He was fascinated with guns and knives but disclaimed traditional medicine power. Some time after the events herein described he was killed in a fire.

On this occasion, for reasons unknown to me, he had taken the medicine bundle of the lame widower from where it hung above where he slept and hidden it somewhere in the bush. This happened when the people were camping in tents during the Summer. The lame man began to grow "too strong" at a time when most of the adults were in town for a stampede. On the afternoon in question he was alone in camp with three children under six years old. Because he did not often go out into the bush he was frequently called into service as babysitter.

During the afternoon the children, my 5 year old informant among them, saw him working quietly by himself sharpening something. They noticed uneasily that he was carefully filing a long nail to a sharp point. The children well knew the story of Giant Wolf whose teeth are like bright metal and who, when sent out to measure the extent of the world by the creator, came back with a human arm in his mouth.

According to my informant's account, the lame man then began to "act strange". He sang something over some water and then told a boy around 6 years old that he should drink it. He told the boy he would like it and it would make him strong. This is significant in that traditionally before being sent out on a vision quest the child must fast and particularly abstain from drinking water. Water has a number of other symbolic associations in the context of supernatural power and medicine acquisition. The boy

drank the water and then he too began to "act strange". At this, the lame man seized him and drove the sharpened nail into his hand. The boy then went berserk, grabbed his father's rifle, loaded it, and began firing wildly around the camp. At this, the two little girls remaining fled the camp and went to where the grandfather of one of them was passing the time of day in a cafe on the highway. He returned to camp, disarmed the boy and overcame the lame man first with force and later with his own medicine song and coat acting as a medicine coat. (These are the traditional curative practices used when a child comes in from the bush after the vision quest unable to speak human language and shy like an animal of the human camp, when a person is sick and when a person has been brought back from a wechuge performance.)

Although I have never seen a wechuge performance first hand I have been told of episodes involving people I knew well. Perhaps these accounts were actually more meaningful than the impressions I would have had as an outside observer, since they describe the events in terms that are symbolically significant to the context of Dunne-za belief in medicine power. I cannot say what "really happened" in these two cases but I can clearly say more than that wechuge is caused by "possession by a cannibal monster".

Although I was not told this in so many words I think it would be an accurate abstraction from the nexus of events and symbols to say that Wechuge is seen as a return of the cannibal monsters of the mythic times. A person begins to act like the mythic animal (jumping up and down, making shiny metal teeth, etc.) when an action by others violates the taboos inherent in the possession of a particular medicine power. The sound of a stretched string will make a person with spider power too strong, eating fly eggs or contact with drums will make a person with frog power too strong, cooking food in an electrical storm, eating red berries, or seeing a flash camera will make someone with Giant Eagle power too strong, stealing or violating a medicine bundle will make its owner too strong. Snake medicine is an interesting case I do not have time to explain here, but part of the complex is that having daughters is the tabooed event that will make the person's power too strong.

In each case the violation of a symbolic taboo associated with the mythic charter of a medicine power will make the person possessing that power too strong, the first stage in becoming Wechuge. If the person is not cured and his power put back into the myth and the medicine bundle, he will begin to eat his own lips, which will turn to ice within him. From this point on it is believed that the person will have become the invincible wechuge monster that appears in the first two stories cited in this paper. Thus, the wechuge complex among the Dunne-za involves at least the following points of focus: 1. myths about the ways in which the giant animals of various species hunted and consumed people, 2. the mythically patterned experience of the vision quest, in which an all-powerful animal gives a human child the power to hunt animals, 3. violation of personal medicine taboo which activates power inherent in the myth, 4. transformation of a person whose medicine has been violated into Wechuge, a monster that eats people. These points of focus integrate into a meaningful symbolic pattern.

The myth of giant animals is a precondition for the transformation of the vision quest, and the transformation induced by a violation of the taboo brings back the myth. The myth is a charter for the vision quest transformation experience, subsequent taboo, and Wechuge performance. Both vision quest and Wechuge performance are transformations of a person's experience into the mythic mode but where in the vision quest the transformation must take place outside of the social circle, in the wechuge performance the transformation takes place in the presence of others. Alone, the child who must be fed by others is given the power to transform the lives of animals into the life of the people; within a social setting in which this power is not respected, the hunter turns upon the human beings (Dunne-za) who have become like animals to him. He becomes the hunter who follows the tracks of people. After meeting a giant animal in the bush on his vision quest the child returns to camp with his power. After meeting with this Power in camp the adult is forced to return to the bush.

The person becoming Wechuge is not demented but simply a person compelled to act upon the logic of his experience in the world. Certainly, his behaviour is motivated by a need to

validate a status claim that is being publicly challenged, but presumably for the person himself the mythically patterned experience of the vision quest is sufficiently authentic to validate his own belief in his medicine powers. The Dunne-za strongly believe that you cannot fake medicine power, and they do not practice its sale or transfer by inheritance or any other means.

I do not know the intricacies of interpersonal politics among the Dunne-za well enough to say why a challenge to someone's medicine power would be precipitated in the first place or how those said to have violated a taboo would feel in a group swept by real terror of a man-eating monster at large in their midst. The social drama of which the wechuge performance is but a small segment has other issues besides those to which I have addressed myself in this paper.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The summary and conclusion I draw from the scene among the Dunne-za I have described is as follows: The Dunne-za are a people who have long lived in large part from the bodies of animals they have hunted. In the round of Dunne-za experience people follow the tracks of animals, meet them, take their lives and take them into their own lives, the life of the camp (kwō), a social as well as physical place. Animals are known to be creatures of volition and experience, and so their distinctive habits, preferences and specific behavioural characteristics are in many ways brought into the life of the camp. Diet, clothing, movement, and even mood are conditioned by the life experience of the animals. The myths provide examples of distinctive and recognizable animal behaviours transformed into cultural terms; the vision quest gives experiential instruction and validation of the connection between life in the bush and life in camp, the realms of animal and human social experience. Wechuge becomes "too strong" when the world of his everyday experience tips the balance into the animal mode of experience translated into human social terms. In the vision quest the person is alone and the animal medicine moves within him, the possession of a benevolent spirit. His subsequent return to the social circle will bring the power of the

benefactor's experience of life into line with the purposes of the people. If instead of receiving his return as the return of benevolent power to the camp, the people consume the space inhabited by his medicine power, it will come back to them only as image of self opposition. When a child's voice consumes the social space they say to him, "Naa-za wontlō", "Your lips too much". When people within the group for whatever reason refuse to provide the social space within which a person's essence can manifest itself, the group consumes itself and projects this in the person of Wechuge, the role that must be played by the logic of the one whose taboo has been violated. Wechuge must consume them all unless a benevolent power once again befriends the person. Wechuge must consume his lips, his means of communication with the minds of humans and the bodies of animals. Wechuge must consume himself as seen in others unless others see themselves in him. Wechuge, myth and actor, is a performance required of the social logic in human (Dunne-za) experience.

There is no "Wechuge Psychosis"; even though every participant in the drama becomes somewhat crazed by the intensity of it. The wechuge performance is more terrifying than mere deviance. It is experienced as the reality of the social body consuming itself, the Giant Animal consuming the people in their childhood. It is a sickness borne by the people of the camp as a whole and cured only by the benevolent application of supernatural power from within the group. The ice within a person who cannot return to the social circle can only be overcome through his death and the application of fire, the symbol of camp life, to the remains. No one among the Dunne-za known to me had known a person who had gone so far, although the story of the cannibal Tsekute who was said to have eaten the parents of people known to me was still fresh on the people's lips.

The performance of the wechuge role seems to have been required more often when people from different groups came together. It seldom occurred within a group of people who were working smoothly together. One would suspect therefore that the incidence of wechuge performance would increase with any increase in the rate of movement of individuals from group to group. Any situation that brought together many people who were unknown

to one another or unused to living together would probably encourage the wechuge role to develop. It seems significant that the story of Tsekute, the only actual person said to have become Wechuge, occurred at a time of maximum social upheaval and was linked to the elaboration of the Plateau Prophet Dance as described by Spier (1935) among the Dunne-za. In every case of wechuge performer brought back within the social realm the precipitating challenge came from a person or persons in some sense outside the social circle. "Women from another reserve" brought meat with fly eggs in it. Hearing the juke box in town precipitated the appearance of giant spider. A young man fascinated by guns but unable to hunt brought on the wolf with shiny teeth. In every case Wechuge came as an outsider who threatened the group from within. Even the white person with flash camera or radio brought a response from the Dunne-za that the power must be respected.

In conclusion I should like to return to the question of comparing the cannibal theme in Algonkian and Athapaskan cultures. I do not know from the available ethnography if the cannibal monster belief and behaviour "windigo psychosis" is symbolically linked to the vision quest, medicine power and mythic man eating monsters in Algonkian cultures as it is among the Dunne-za. The literature tells us only that cannibal monsters existed in myth and behaviour in Algonkian societies that were also known to have the vision quest and medicine powers.

Perhaps the behaviour described as "windigo psychosis" was not integrated into cannibal monster myth, the vision quest and a belief in medicine power among the Algonkians in the way I have described for the Dunne-za. The Dunne-za themselves articulated differences they perceived between themselves and the Cree. Cree medicine could be bought and sold, for instance, but in the only case I knew of where a Dunne-za bought medicine from a Cree the purchaser (who was the very same Asa whose medicine was frog) was thought to have been swindled.

Within the context of boreal forest cultural adaptations there must of course be considerable variation in the ways homologous elements of culture are integrated, but I would be very much surprised to find an element of belief and practice as basic as

the cannibal theme to be simply un-integrated into the mythical and metaphysical nexus of Algonkian culture. Supposing that it had at some time been integrated into myth and medicine in a way somewhat similar to that of wechuge among the Dunne-za, then one might look to history to explain the apparent differences between windigo and wechuge. In general the Algonkians have experienced a longer period of disruptive influence from contact with Europeans than the Dunne-za and have particularly undergone more pressures that caused mixing of populations. Given an aboriginal system of meaning like that associated with wechuge one would therefore expect an increase in wechuge like incidents and perhaps an ultimate deterioration of the concept from strength to weakness. In time, fear of the performance might become more compelling than the reintegration of its cure.

I return to the questions posed at the beginning of this paper. Are Athapaskan and Algonkian peoples of the boreal forest so different from one another that the cannibal monster belief has opposite meanings in the two contexts: If the meanings are different why is this so? Is the idea of "windigo psychosis" an interpretive projection from our own categories of thought? In light of the preceding detailed description of wechuge and its place within an integrated set of symbols and meanings I can offer the following suggestions.

1. Athapaskan and Algonkian behavioural adaptations to the boreal forest are similar in general outline. Both cultures include a concept of medicine power, the vision quest, and myths about giant animals transformed by a culture hero. Descriptions of Athapaskan and Algonkian social organization and personality indicate a general similarity. Differences with respect to ownership of hunting territories have been shown to be largely a product of different acculturative experience. In both areas human patterns of life must be integrated with the patterns of animal life. Observers have described the cultural psychology of the two groups of people in similar terms.

It may be, however, that from similar natural and cultural environments the Algonkians and Athapaskans developed a common image of the cannibal in two equally possible but different

directions. Among the Dunne-za Wechuge is truly feared and must be killed if he cannot be cured, but a person's performance of the wechuge role is a sign of his medicine's strength, not of his personal weakness. It is the role that is feared rather than the person acting in it. It may be that Windigo is feared because in it the role of cannibal has consumed the person of the actor. Such a shift in emphasis could perhaps account for the apparently greater incidence among the Algonkians of violent death as an outcome of a windigo incident. It may also be that the Dunne-za pattern of behavioural taboo relating myths about giant animals, the vision quest, and the performance of a cannibal role, is simply not part of the Algonkian complex. Perhaps the similarities between windigo and wechuge result from an integration into Dunne-za conceptual terms of specific elements of the windigo complex, (eating of the lips, ice in the gut, burning of the body). The comparison of wechuge and windigo points out a lack of information on the symbolic integration of Algonkian myth, vision quest, and belief in supernatural power.

2. I have suggested that if the meanings of wechuge and windigo are different in the two contexts the divergence could have come about either through a lengthy movement of the cannibal image in two equally possible but different directions within the two traditions or through a more rapid shift in the meaning of windigo due to recent acculturative influences. The latter hypothesis seems the most economical and may account for a large part of whatever real difference in meaning exists between the two cannibal images. Although windigo may never have been performed specifically upon the violation of a medicine taboo in the way I have described for wechuge it seems likely that it was at one time a role performance somehow connected to a concept of medicine power and that the flux of history changed it as it changed the aboriginal system of land use into what has been described by a variety of western observers as an overpowering fear of the cannibal monster appearing among the people. It is well known from other parts of the world that the dislocation of stable social relationships, systems of meaning, and ecological adaptations is often accompanied by an increase in witchcraft activity and related breaches in confidence.

3. The literature on windigo starts from an assumption that it is a culturally patterned form of psychosis. It attempts to explain the relatively few instances of cannibal behaviour and the more common fear and anxiety about it by reference to generalizations about underlying Indian personality characteristics. The assumption that windigo belief and behaviour is psychotic has gained a kind of tacit acceptance because of our own culture's willingness to reify the labels we have become accustomed to using to describe a phenomenon we do not otherwise understand.

Windigo behaviour may indeed prove to be a sign of personality disintegration among Algonkian peoples. There certainly is a commonsense reaction that tells us you have to be crazy to want to eat your friends and relatives. The element of compulsive desire and craving for human flesh that appears in many of the windigo cases may point to a "psychotic" breakdown of normal emotions, motivations, and satisfactions in people who kill or are killed as cannibal monsters, but although contorted, even aberrant, windigo behaviour differs from most psychotic behaviour in our own culture in that it is believed to be genuine and real by the members of society as well as by the afflicted individual. People believed to be psychotic in our culture believe themselves to be actors in situations the reality of which is not subscribed to by normal members of society. Normal people do not accept the psychotic's claim that he is Napoleon in our society, in contrast to the Algonkian situation in which the person who acts like a cannibal monster is genuinely believed to be one. Our labelling system when applied to the windigo phenomenon breaks down on close examination. We label the behaviour of the windigo actor as psychotic but not the beliefs of these who accept his role as real.

I conclude that any understanding of either belief or behaviour must emerge from an understanding of its context be that culture history or case history. We can only understand belief or behaviour as a meaningful element in articulation with other elements of meaning. I think I know enough of the Dunne-za wechuge performance in the context of its relation to vision quest experience, myth, and medicine, to distinguish it from behaviour I have seen labelled as psychotic in our culture and to question the labelling of Algonkian windigo as psychotic by the culture of anthropology.

I trust there are those among us who will be in a position to respond to some of the questions raised by this comparative essay, and we should be fortunate to hear from them of their knowledge.

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